

The Pocahontas Times

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Many a proud West Virginia family lives on a tomahawk grant. In the Greenbrier Valley there is a slight distinction as to the tomahawk grants, as most of the first families came in under contract with the Greenbrier Company and had some claim to trace their titles to the crown, and many of these grants were but a confirmation of the surveying that Gen. Andrew Lewis and his young friend Gen. George Washington had done in the odd times in the French and Indian wars. But these Greenbrier titles were perfected by the same act of the legislature that recognized the tomahawk grant.

There are three plausible theories as to why the old settlers called these titles tomahawk grants. One is that it was a reward for their courage in facing the tomahawk and scalping knife in making their settlements on the western waters when the king of England had forbidden them to settle west of the Alleghany Mountain on the specious charge of being too expensive to protect. The second is that the way the map looked when the surveys were filed under one of these titles invariably resembled a tomahawk in shape. And the third is the one given by Doddridge who could remember moving to the neighborhood of Fairmont in 1773, that the settler when he made a home in the wilderness invariably chose a spring and around the spring marked the timber plainly by cutting his initials with a tomahawk into the bark, just as later the custom was extended to lay claim to a bee tree. This last reason is perhaps the true one.

In 1779, the legislature of Virginia divided the Western Waters into four districts. The first consisted of the counties of Monongalia, Yohogania, and Ohio. The second, Augusta, Botetourt, and Greenbrier. The third, Washington and Montgomery. The fourth the county of Kentucky. The legislature recited that there were many settlers on the western waters who had not been able to perfect their claims owing to the Indian wars; the fact that the king had refused to allow settlers there; the fact that the former Governor of Virginia had fled; that since the independence of the colonies that Virginia had opened no land office; and that for the risk and charge their lands should be secured to them. Therefore in was enacted that in any case a bona fide settlement had been made prior to the 1st day of January, 1778, on waste and unappropriated lands, that the settler should have the right to 400 acres around his clearing, and to have the right to preempt 1000 acres additional adjoining the 400, if the 1000 acres could be secured without interfering with other titles. On this act the settlers took out title papers to a vast quantity of the choicest land in what is now West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Kentucky. In the practical working out of the title question at that time, a rule as to what constituted a settler was adopted to the effect that any pioneer who has raised a crop of grain no matter how small a patch, was a settler who was entitled to his 1400 acres.

The act was highly beneficial and settled the titles and a state was founded. But not all of the settlers were provident enough to take advantage of the legislation while it remained in force and long after the time had passed in which a tomahawk grant could be perfected, tomahawk titles sprang up in cases where the claimants had not filed surveys. These were squatter titles and in some instances were bought by the real owner under quit claim deeds, out in time they got to be such a nuisance that the settlers banded together and would capture the adverse claimant and beat him with hickory whips and quiet the title in that way. So in the end the tomahawk title ceased to be one to be proud of, and sank to the condition of a squatters claim. So they were beaten with many stripes.

One of the great discoveries of the pioneer days was that the land west of the divide grew better the longer it was farmed, whereas the custom east of the Blue Ridge had been to take off a few crops from a piece of land and then throw it out to the commons as unproductive land. This gave a great impetus to the colonization of the Western Waters.

Stand by to be bored with augurs. Last Thursday in the afternoon under the spreading peach tree in the back yard a group of chickens huddled together, and the boughs of the tree were as full of leaves in the summer time. These birds stayed there hour after hour. The day was an ordinary winter day. There has never been an official augur appointed for this town but we all work at it some. So after a time we said that the birds so assembled meant that a storm was coming, probably a

great snow. When train 143 came in at 4:35 bringing the weather dope from Elkins, sure enough the forecast said snow that night. But we had known it in this instance before the cards came—the little birds had told us. That night a big snow commenced to fall and kept it up until there was upwards of a foot on the ground.

The most frightful weather ever experienced in this country was the drop in the temperature of some 70 degrees of the 4th of February and the terrible wind that commenced to blow at six o'clock in the evening. It hit this town just as the train came in that Sunday bearing the news of war with Germany, and then for more than an hour as the word sank in that we were at last hooked up with the Old World madness, the wind threatened to blow the house down and there never was such a dreadful accompaniment to such stirring intelligence. "The storm is up, and all is on the bazzard!"

This storm coming Sunday night it chese the only time that it could attack us unprepared for the way the mails run between here and the Weather Station at Elkins, there is the space of twenty-four hours from Sunday evening to Monday evening, in which we are without protection, except such as native ability furnishes us.

But in this crisis the birds spoke true. Two incidents were observed by the augurs on Saturday. One was the singing of snow birds and the other was the appearance of a flock of english sparrows with a big fox sparrow with them, all frantically hunting something to eat. This fox sparrow is covered with brown spots all over its back, breast and sides, with a reddish brown tail. It is between seven and eight inches long and makes a very gaudy appearance when ranked with the english sparrow. It is a Canadian bird but winters in the south. We therefore say that the fearful storm was not wholly unexpected. Of course we could not tell exactly what to expect or in what form it would come, but we knew that something terrible was about to happen. The lower animals sought shelter and made ready to wait until the storm was over, but man fashions his day by his watch and defies the elements "nor heeds the storm which howls across the sky." Therefore the wind caught men in the open and made mock of their strength, and they were filled with fear as to what the next blast of the wind would do to them.

"Whirled in a swift and cloudy turbulence, as when some star of Eblis downward hurled by Allah's bolt, sweeps with its burning hair the waste of darkness."

The ancient augurs looked for signs in everything, but the most satisfying signs that they had to rely upon were the movements, appearance, flight, singing, and feeding of birds. It was a poor augur that given a few birds to observe could not collect a few bright guesses as to what was about to happen and make a fifty-fifty prediction.

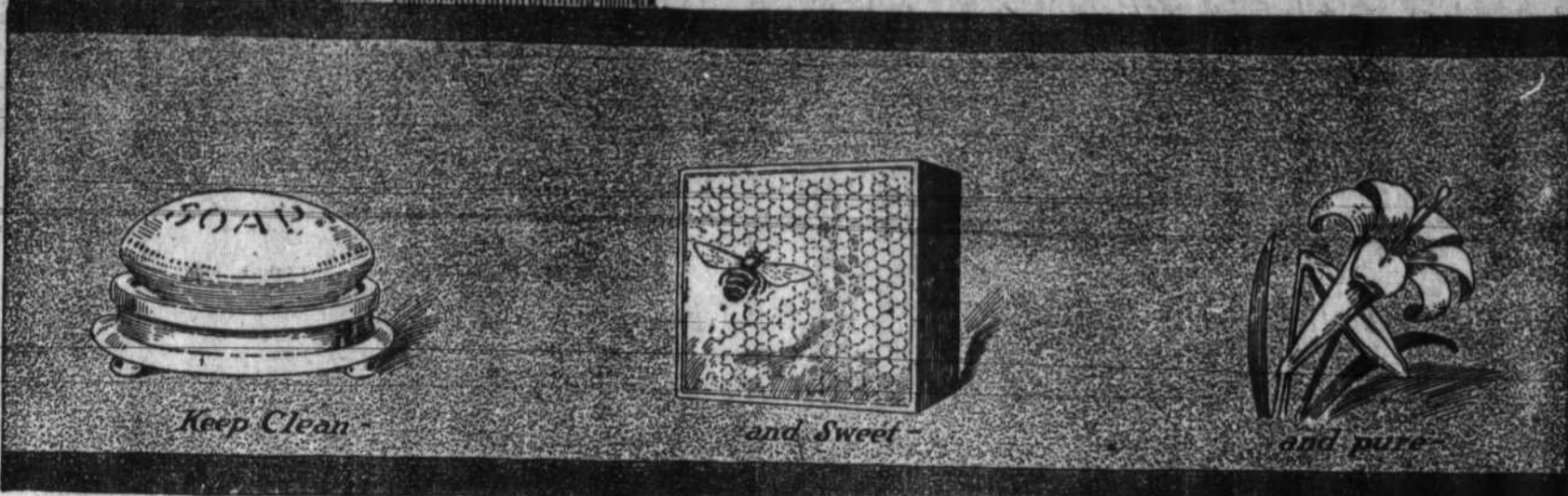
In the legislative assemblies, all that the delegate from Tusculum had to do to retard legislation which might affect the transportation companies plying between Tusculum and Rome, was to arise in his place and say that the signs were not auspicious as to the ultimate effect of the proposed bill as that morning as he came to the statehouse he saw a bird with a worm in its bill, which well known sign was a warning against doing anything or changing anything, and one which none but a fool would disregard, and therefore the bill was tabled.

In the courts, lawyers got to seeing birds so frequently in asking for continuances that a law was finally passed, that the judge should take no cognizance of the doings of the birds, unless he observed the sign himself, or another judge of equal rank and dignity communicated to him the fact that the birds had given such a sign, leaving, however, the judge some discretion as to the believing the words of other persons and acting accordingly.

The consul could not be prosecuted for disregarding the signs while in office, but after his term he could be severely punished for not doing what the birds told him to.

The day before Caesar was slain, the birds were busy: "And yesterday the birds of night did sit, Even at noon in the market place, Hooting and shrieking. When these prodigies Do so conjointly meet, let no man say, These are their reasons—they are natural; For I believe they are portentous things Unto the climate that they point upon."

The legislature is dallying with the game bill again and trying to shave a hog with a hand-saw. In the first place, very few of them could tell a hawk from a handsaw or "hand-saw," as the typographical error or the bad handwriting of Shakespeare made it to read. Most of the statesmen have a kind of an idea that if they could tax every man who carries a gun about a dollar a head that they could make two rabbits grow where but one grew before, but we say unto



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you, that it's not so. That when- ever the Israelite in New York, Chicago, or St. Louis raises the price of fur ten per cent, that he furnishes more protection to the game and fish than all the legisla- tures that have assembled in all the countries from the days of ancient Rome to the time when the hired girls formed a circle around the White House. The game laws could all be repealed with advantage save two things: The law against the sale of game and game fish; and a law giving such munificent bounties on the scalp of the fur bearing animals, that they would perish from the face of the earth. The people of this State could not raise sheep until the wolves were exterminated, and we cannot raise game until some of the carnivorous animals who destroy game every day are destroyed. That dollar license is a great nuisance. It is an unnatural license. Any license that embraces practically all of the popula- ce is not a license. It is a head tax. A license presupposes some special privilege that only a small percentage of the population will require. If the money has to be raised, let it be raised as other taxes are raised. To make a man take out a hunting license is like making him take out a license to play checkers.

The unfortunate Hamlet assured his friends that his political enemies were somewhat deceived and might not take all the precaution necessary. He said: "I'm but mad north-north-west: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw." What the daft child said must have been that in his lucid moments he could tell a hawk from a hand-saw. That is a hawk, from a target made to resemble a hawk. Like a latter day

sport saying that he was not so far gone that he could not tell a crow from a clay pigeon.

The Legislature is on the last lap. The session comes to an end Saturday night or Sunday morn- ing in one final death flurry. The clock will be turned back and bills passed in a kind of frenzy. They ought to have that final flurry five days prior to the end of the ses- sion, and spend an additional five days there looking over what they did in their excitement and recon- sider any ill advised measure.

Last fall the big paper manu- facturers said Let us pray! Last week when the grand jury assem- bled they said Let us pray!

From what we can learn there is a disposition on the part of the farmers of this county to raise the biggest crops that they have ever raised in the county. If the present prices could not put a little ginger into the old boys, we do not know what would speed them up.

With votes quoted at a dollar each in Cincinnati, the State of Ohio increases the number of elec- tors by giving the women the right to vote for President. The new voters will be the dear ones.

It is said that Cornwell is going to have a right considerable of an inauguration. It ought to be something out of the usual for it has been just twenty-four years since a Democratic governor swore in at Charleston. We saw one governor inaugurated in West Virginia. It was about as excit- ing as a wedding. There was the governor in a silk hat, and a bunch of soldiers, and a bunch of colo- nels, and quite a large crowd of other people who were on foot and



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who stood up in the hall of the House of Delegates and saw the governor take the oath of office and listened to some of the dull speeches that were ever delivered by mortal man. We were hemmed in by a lot of colored people and could not see very well so we quit and went back to the hotel to get something to eat, not caring to tough it out. We noticed one thing at the time, and that was that the busy citizens of Charle-

ton, seemed to take no notice of this great event, but went about their work as usual. The crowd's heading looked largely like a bunch of men who were out of jobs.

Prohibition as a national issue is growing like a green bay tree. The first thing you know some desperate political party will grab the issue and then for fire-works and fire-water.

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